

Red Plague Drops in Dixie States

Pellagra Deaths Are Down 65 Per Cent in Past Twelve Years

Washington.—Back in 1928, virtually at the peak of prosperity, health authorities of thirteen southern states reported that twenty-two persons out of every 100,000 were dying of pellagra—the merciless red plague of nutritional starvation. It was the highest recorded death rate since the disease had been discovered, and presented a challenge to social agencies.

Equally alarming, authorities found that for every human dying of it, there were thirty-five other pellagrins, suffering in varying degrees. A year before when the Mississippi River spilled over its banks and drove thousands of sick, pellagrous men, women and children from their small cabins, Red Cross workers saw the horrors of the disease. They immediately launched a campaign against it.

Dr. William DeKleine, who had been appointed temporary medical adviser of the Red Cross, was assigned to the work. After months of research, in cooperation with the United States Public Health Service, he announced that he knew of no other disease easier to prevent. He pointed out that it required no medicine, no serums, no medical treatment—only the right kind of food in adequate amounts.

Yet, the Red Cross was faced with this problem: as in other sections of the country, the disease prevailed where the economic level was very low. Thousands of families could not afford to purchase the right kind of foods in sufficient quantity. The solution came from Dr. Joseph Goldberger, of the United States Public Health Service.

His analysis of pellagra was a far cry from that which had prevailed in medical circles for years. In the early part of the century, two views were advanced as to its origin—one that it was infectious, the other that it was caused by eating deteriorated foods. Conclusions reached by Doctor Goldberger enabled Doctor DeKleine to strike at pellagra in two ways.

The first was to have Red Cross chapters distribute powdered yeast to pellagrins. The second approach was the distribution of garden seed to enable share croppers and other low-income bracket families to grow an abundance of fresh vegetables—at least for part of the year.

Since 1927, yeast has been given away by Red Cross chapters in the south at the rate of nearly 75,000 pounds annually. Four-pound packages of garden seed have been distributed at the rate of nearly 100,000 each year.

Results have been spectacular: The last reports reveal that pellagra fatalities have dropped 65 per cent since 1928. As compared with the twenty-two deaths per hundred thousand in 1928, less than eight persons in the same population group are dying today, according to Doctor DeKleine.

Yet the job is just beginning, Doctor DeKleine says. Yeast is but temporary relief from pellagra. It contains certain protective vitamins that keep potential pellagrins just above the danger line. The solution rests entirely on nutrition—adequate diet. And to meet this need, Red Cross chapters not only are distributing garden seed, but nutrition courses are being conducted in communities to teach family heads how a properly balanced meal can be planned to fit the family purse.—*Red Cross News Service.*

LETTERS

Subject: Essay Contest for High School Students Under Sponsorship of the Committee on Public Health Education of the California Medical Association.*

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION

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2007 Wilshire Boulevard,
Los Angeles, California,
March 25, 1940.

Dear Doctor Kress:

I am enclosing copy of a letter which I have just sent to Doctor Douglass of the State Board of Education, re-

* For editorial comment, see page 154.

garding the Essay Contest which is being sponsored by the Committee on Public Health Education.

I have received Chairman Makinson's O. K. to proceed with this matter, and you may use this letter for whatever publicity you care to in CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE.

The Subcommittee on Essay Contests consists of Samuel Ayres, Jr. (chairman), Los Angeles; Thomas A. Card, Riverside; Albert G. Bower, Glendale; Elmer Belt, Los Angeles; and E. Vincent Askey, Los Angeles.

I have given a copy to Mr. Ross Marshall for general publicity.

Very sincerely,

SAMUEL AYRES, JR., M. D.,
Member of Committee on Public
Health Education.

✓ ✓ ✓

(COPY)

2007 Wilshire Boulevard,
Los Angeles, California,
March 21, 1940.

Dr. Aubrey A. Douglass,
Chief of Division of Secondary Education,
State Department of Education,
Sacramento, California.

Dear Doctor Douglass:

According to your suggestion regarding publicizing the forthcoming Essay Contest, I am forwarding material for publication in the school bulletin, "California Schools," which I trust will reach you in time to be included in the April issue.

This Essay Contest is sponsored by the Committee on Public Health Education of the California Medical Association, and may be participated in by students in high schools and junior colleges in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades as of the next fall term, inasmuch as the contest will not close until November 1. It was felt that it would be desirable to leave the contest open during the summer months.

The subject of this first essay is "The Rôle of the Doctor of Medicine in the Life and Health of the American Citizen." The following prizes will be awarded: First prize, \$100; second prize, \$50; third prize, \$25; and five additional prizes of \$5 each. Each of these awards will be accompanied by an appropriate certificate.

The essay should not exceed three thousand words in length. The essays should be typewritten if possible, with double spacing and ample margin, but this is not required, inasmuch as it was felt that it might exclude some students who might not have access to typewriters. As soon as the essays are finished, they may be mailed to the office of the California Medical Association, 450 Sutter Street, San Francisco, and plainly marked on the envelop, "Essay Contest." The details of judging the contest will be announced later.

Again I would like to emphasize that the students who will be eligible to participate are those who will be in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades next fall, *i. e.*, who are now in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades. It should be emphasized that all essays must be original work, although it is expected that free use will be made of appropriate references.

In addition to this announcement, suitable general publicity will be announced about April 1, at the time of the opening of the contest.

Very sincerely,

SAMUEL AYRES, JR., M. D.,
Committee on Public Health Education.